

Identity theft continues to be a major problem

With the advances in technology, identity theft has been on the rise, causing problems for thousands of individuals, members of the retiree community included. According to Air Force Office of Special Investigations officials and civilian law enforcement officials, the threat is there, and everyone needs to be aware of how disastrous the results can be.

Identity theft occurs when someone gains key pieces of information about another person for the purpose of establishing a line of credit. Although Social Security numbers were originally intended to be used for record keeping purposes by the Social Security Board only, over time and with the penetration of computers into almost every aspect of modern life, Social Security numbers have in fact, become widely used. That makes much of today's electronic commerce and record keeping possible, but it also presents dangers to individuals. With your Social Security number and a few other key facts, an imposter can assume your identity and wreak havoc with your life. That is why it is important for you to take a few steps to safeguard your personal information including your Social Security number.

Here are some things you can do: Shred pre-approved credit card applications, credit card receipts, bills and other financial information. Keep your Social Security card in a safe place: do not carry it with you. Be careful about giving your SSN to others. Of course, you will need to give your number to some business and government agencies, like your employer, your bank, or other financial institutions, and of course the IRS at tax time, but always know whom you are giving it to and how they will use it. You can refuse to give your SSN, but that business or agency is not required to give you service if you refuse. So, use your SSN only to conduct necessary business, and if you have good reason to suspect that someone is misusing your SSN, report it immediately to Social Security's Fraud Hotline, 1-800-269-0271.

Long term care insurance

Long Term Care Insurance, Public Law 106-265, was signed by the President last fall, but its reality is still in the future. This law providing insurance for federal government employees, military active duty, federal and military retirees and their family members, will not be available until about October 2002. According to Office of Personnel Management officials, it takes that long to write contracts, get bids, approve the contracts, get them in place and write implementation instructions. Then comes the task of working with a contractor to develop educational and enrollment materials, so potential enrollees can make an informed decision, and prepare for the open season. There will be no government subsidy, but the plan is expected to reduce rates by about 20 percent below those of individual commercial plans. As it becomes available, information will be posted on the Office of Personnel Management web site at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/ltc/index.htm>.

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